(b) if so, whether Army has initiated any action to replace the aged Cheetah and Chetak helicopters; and

(c) to what extent Army has succeeded to configure Dhruv helicopter to high altitude requirements?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) A need has been felt to replace the existing Cheetah/Chetak fleet as they are of 1960s vintage and hence not suitably equipped for all weather and night operations in high altitude areas.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) Dhruv is presently powered with engine TM-333-2B2 of M/s Turbomeca, France, during the trial of which at high altitude in hot and cold weather conditions, the maximum altitude for take off and landing was demonstrated upto 5.95 Km pressure altitude. However, in order to meet the Army's need for operating Dhruv with additional pay load at higher altitude, a higher power engine named 'Shakti' is being co-developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited with M/s Turbomeca, France. The first flight of Dhruv with 'Shakti' engine is planned by the end of 2006.

Indo-France naval exercises

2983. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India and France have begun naval exercises off Kochi port;

(b) if so, the expenditure incurred thereon;

(c) whether Government signed any MoU with any other countries to begin naval exercises for the next 3 years; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE) (a) Indo-France Naval exercise was held off Kochi port from 27 February, 2005 to 7th March, 2005.

(b) Indian Navy has not incurred any extra expenditure during this exercise, other than the normal operational cost of the Indian ships involved in this exercise, which is estimated at Rs. 44 lakh only.

(c) No Memorandum of Understanding has been signed to carry out joint naval exercises with foreign navies during the next three years.

(d) Does not arise.

Demining of Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus route

2984. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Indian Army has demined the stretch from weak Bridge to wood Bridge on a bus route of Srinagar-Muzaffarabad, but the left and right banks are still strewn with antipersonnel mines; and

(b) if so, the steps Government propose to take to ensure that vehicles on this route do not skid in area filled with mines?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE) (a) and (b) The entire route followed by the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus and areas on both sides of the road have been demined. Further, parapet walls and crash barries have been constructed to ensure safety of the vehicles playing on this route.

Harassment of women cadets at IAF Training Academy, Andhra Pradesh

2985. SHRI S.M. LALJAN BASHA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the incidents of harassment of women cadets at IAF Training Academy in Dindigul in Andhra Pradesh;

(b) if so, what are the details of the incident and related harassment of women cadets;

(c) whether senior officers had turned a blind eye to such heppenings; and

(d) to what extent had the commandant of the Academy acted to take punitive measures against the guilty persons alongwith details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) The allegations of harassment have been brought out by three Ex-